

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 0249

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ORFP, CB

SUBJ: SENATOR THURMOND'S VISIT TO PHNOM PENH

1. VISIT OF SENATORS THURMOND AND SCOTT ON JANUARY 4 TO PHNOM PENH WENT WELL. IT WAS FIRST VISIT BY AMERICAN SENATORS TO THE KHMER REPUBLIC IN VERY LONG TIME AND KHMERS WERE VISIBLY PLEASED TO HEAR FROM SENATOR THURMOND PRAISE FOR "THE DETERMINATION AND GALLANTRY WITH WHICH THIS SMALL NATION HAS RESISTED COMMUNIST AGGRESSION", AN ASSESSMENT QUITE CONTRARY TO THE OFTEN UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM THE KHMERS HAVE HEARD FROM AMERICAN OPPONENTS OR UNFRIENDLY PRESS OVER LAST COUPLE OF YEARS. SENATOR THURMOND WAS CLEARLY IN CHARGE OF VISIT AND SENATOR SCOTT TOOK BACK SEAT ALL DURING THE DAY.

2. SENATORS FIRST MET WITH AMERICAN COUNTRY TEAM AND THEN SPENT 3 1/2 HOURS WITH LON NOL AND SENIOR KHMER OFFICIALS AT CHAMCAR MON WHERE MARSHAL DECORATED THURMOND AND HOSTED LUNCHEON FOR THE VISITORS. SENATOR THURMOND AND WIFE ALSO VISITED REFUGEE SITE SOUTHWEST OF CITY WHERE HE TALKED THROUGH INTERPRETER WITH DESTITUTE CIVILIANS WHO HAD JUST FLED FROM KC TERRORISM AND HAD THEIR HOUSES BURNT FIVE MILES FROM WHERE SENATOR INTERVIEWED THE REFUGEES. PRIME MINISTER, FANK COMMANDER SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ AND I WERE WITH THURMOND ON THIS VISIT, WHICH BROUGHT HOME TO HIM NEED FOR ADEQUATE U.S. SUPPORT FOR GKR MORE THAN ALL THE BRIEFINGS WE COULD GIVE HIM. THE CONSTANT ARTILLERY THE TWO SENATORS HEARD ALL DURING

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THEIR VISIT (WHICH WAS NEEDED TO KEEP KC AT BAY) GAVE

THE LEGISLATORS A MORE REALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF FANK'S AMMUNITION REQUIREMENTS AND WHY GKR NEEDED SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS.

3. SENATOR THURMOND WAS A STAUNCH ADVOCATE OF GKR CAUSE WELL BEFORE EVER SETTING FOOT ON CAMBODIAN SOIL. IN MY CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM I EMPHASIZED PRESIDENT FORD'S STATEMENT MADE IN VAIL DECEMBER 30 ON SIGNING THE 1974 FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ACT IN WHICH HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE LEVELS FOR CAMBODIA ARE INADEQUATE TO MEET MINIMUM BASIC NEEDS AND THAT HE INTENDED TO DISCUSS THIS CRITICAL ISSUE WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE TIME. BZJORE BOARDING HIS PLANE, SENATOR THURMOND SAID TO ME THAT I COULD TELL SECRETARY KISSINGER THAT HE WOULD STRONGLY SUPPORT ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST FOR APPROPRIATIONS OF ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR CAMBODIA "TO GIVE KHMER MILITARY THE NEEDED AMMUNITION TO BRING WAR TO A SUCCESSFUL ENDING."

4. IT IS MY HOPE THAT THE FIRSTHAND LOOK SENATOR HAD AT WHAT IS GOING ON HERE WILL GIVE HIM ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY IN DEFENDING FUTURE REQUEST FOR SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR CAMBODIA. AMONG THE ARGUMENTS I SUGGESTED TO SENATOR WHICH MIGHT BE EFFECTIVE IN CONVINCING SOME OF HIS MORE SKEPTICAL COLLEAGUES WAS EMPHASIS THAT STRENGTHENING KHMER MILITARY POSITION WOULD HELP BRING ABOUT EARLY NEGOTIATIONS WHICH IS GOAL OF U.S. POLICY HERE. SECONDLY, I SAID CAMBODIA IS RICH COUNTRY, AND ONCE FIGHTING CAME TO A HALT, AND ONCE LOCAL PRODUCTION RESTORED, U.S. ASSISTANCE COULD BE GREATLY REDUCED. IN SHORT, I STRESSED NEED FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDS NOW TO SAVE MONEY IN THE LONG RUN. WHILE SENATOR THURMOND WAS NOT PARTICULARLY ENAMORED WITH POSSIBLE COMPROMISE SOLUTION HERE, HE NEVERTHELESS UNDERSTOOD THAT REALISTICALLY THAT WAS PROBABLY THE BEST THAT WAS OBTAINABLE HERE.
DEAN

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